DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 054 CS 004 287

AUTHOR Berger, Allen
TITLE Contributions of Ethics and Philosophy tc Reading Instruction and Research.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the World Congress on Reading (7th, Hamburg, West Germany, August 1-3, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Credibility; *Educaticnal Responsibility; *Ethics; *Integrity; Moral Values; *Philosophy; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; Teacher Responsibility
IDENTIFIERS Kant (Immanuel); Nietzsche (Friedrich); Thoreau (Henry David)

ABSTRACT

Ethics in education is a neglected area, yet everything that is good in educatien springs from ethics while everything that is bad reflects the lack of them. When confronted with ethical questions concerning their administrators, colleagues, or students, educators often adopt the stance that "it is never too wise to be too honest." Honesty, however, is the beginning of ethics. Educators who see a conflict between ethical behavior and practical considerations might be guided by the philosophers Thoreau, Kant, and Nietzsche, among others, whose writings contain a clear call for honesty and courage. Thoughtful action is needed in all times; and whether or not educators engage in such action they cannct escape the state of their ethics being mirrored in their daily words. On a scale ranking the amount of freedom for integrity found in various occupations, Stuart Chase places that of professors at the midway point. Yet tenure provides educators with the academic freedom to ask ethical questions about such practices as neglecting students and teaching in order to do empty research; overtesting students; avoiding the real causes of illiteracy; ignoring the real needs of students, teachers, and administrators; questicning false methods and misleading claims; and handling censorship. If educatcrs, even with tenure, find it too difficult to ask disturbing ethical questions and confront the answers, perhaps every schccl throughout the world should establish a loyal opposition, a person or group whcse responsibility it is tc ask trenchant ethical questions. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED157054

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Allen Berger
4H01 Forbes Quadrangle
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
United States of America

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Allen Berger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Contributions of Ethics and Philosophy to Reading Instruction and Research

A Paper Presented at the VII World Congress on Reading, Hamburg, West Germany

August 1, 1978

Allen Berger

University of Pittsburgh

In presenting a paper, someone once told me, begin with a story. But what story can I tell about ethics and philosophy? Imagine my joy when browsing through newspapers on Friday, February tenth of this year, I saw a story about ethics on the front page of The Wall Street Journal. Not just any story, mind you, but a story entitled "Donald Duck Faces a Morals Charge in Western Europe" with the sub-title "German Defenders Say Hero, Albeit Bottomless, Never Laid a Hand on Daisy." The story originated in Hamburg, West Germany.

CS004287

For those unfamiliar with the front-page story, the lead sentence explains that "there's a bit of a row in Western Europe over whether Donald Duck, Walt Disney's famous cartoon character, is immoral."

The story continues:

"In Finland, the Helsinki youth committee has found that Donald's 50-year engagement to Daisy Duck, plus the uncertain parentage of Donald's newphews Huey, Dewey and Louie, plus the sailor's suit Donald wears that leaves his feathery bottom uncovered, constitute a racy life style inappropriate for viewing by youth. At the committee's urging, the Helsinki city council has cancelled library subscriptions to Donald Duck comic books at youth club libraries.

"But here in this northern German city, Hans von Storch, a 28-year-old mathematician and founder of the 100-member Donald Duck Club, calls the morals charge 'ridiculous.' Pointing out that Donald doesn't drink, smoke, take drugs or have sex with Daisy, Mr. von Storch says, 'Donald is one of the most moral ducks in history.' He has written the Finnish ambassador to West Germany demanding that the Helsinki council reverse its decision."

While awaiting the outcome let us consider the meanings of morals and ethics. To quote The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language:

> Moral pertains to personal behavior....Ethical approaches behavior from a philosophical standpoint; it stresses more objectively defined, but essentially idealistic, standards of right and wrong, such as those applicable to the practices of lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. (p. 852).

So how Donald and Daisy behave in private says something about their morals; how each relates to the rest of the world tells us something about their ethics.

For nearly three years now I have been collecting newspaper stories containing the word "ethics" in their headlines. Whenever I saw the word "ethics" or "ethical," I cut out the news story and tossed it onto a pile. Last month I began sorting out the pile, and when I was finished I found that I had well over a hundred news stories pertaining to the ethics of doctors, about half that number relating to the ethical behavior of lawyers and judges, a similar number of stories about ethics and businessmen. I even had little piles of news stories for athletes, journalists. Excluding the few news stories I found about values clarification and moral development, there was hardly a news story about ethics in education.

This finding--or lack of finding--is not too surprising. When was the last time you had the opportunity to attend a session on ethics at a reading conference? Thumb through the programs of reading conferences and conventions: hardly a session deals with ethics. Yet from ethics springs so much of value: my relationship to you; yours to me; our relationship to our students; that to our colleagues. Going further, one might suggest that everything that is good in education springs from our ethics; everything that is bad reflects our lack of them.

Earlier this year at a reading conference in Bloomsburg, a small town in eastern Pennsylvania, I was speaking to a small group of teachers about the problem of ethics in education. I posed the question: how honest can you be and still be a successful teacher? Put another way, I asked, if your principal makes a decision based upon financial or political expediency, and you know that the decision is not educationally sound, that it is not in the best interests of your students, what do you do? The teachers in the group were old, young, tenured, non-tenured, union, non-union, and with only one exception all agreed that it is not

too wise to be too honest. Yet, "however one defines ethics, one cannot be ethical if one is not honest," we are reminded by the Ethics Resource Center. "Take honesty out of ethics and you get hypocrisy. True, ethics involves more than being honest, but honesty is the beginning point of ethics." It must be followed by action. (p. 18).

Now I am well aware of the dangers of presenting a paper such as this. I am leaving myself wide open to be criticized for sounding moralistic, for possessing a holier-than-thou attitude, for making judgments. Yet I would be the first to admit that I know little about morals and even less about judging the ethical behavior of other people. Teachers, for example, and researchers who suggest that it is not wise to be too honest--what can I say other than to acknowledge the fact that they are very tuned in to the ways of the world. Students who tell me that it is unwise to annoy their professors--what can I say other than admire their perspicacity? Was Descartes so wrong as to keep silent after observing what happened to Galileo? If angels fear to tread, why should we?

It is because of my ignorance that I turned to the great philosophers. What might there be in their writings that would be of help to us in education? Let me now share with you excerpts from the writings of these great thinkers from England, France, Germany, Israel and the United States.

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," wrote Henry David Thoreau in Walden. He picks up his theme in his Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience, which so greatly influenced Mahatma Gandhi.

"The mass of men," he writes, "serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailors, constable, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or the moral sense; but they put themselves on the level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others--as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office holders--serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the Devil, without intending it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it." In another part of his essay Thoreau asks: "Must the citizen, even for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience.... Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward."

Earlier in the nineteenth century in another part of the world Immanuel Kant was writing the Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals. In it, Kant points out the importance of duty to oneself and others. He looks upon ethics as the doctrine of duties. Like Thoreau, he cites the value of honesty and considers the lie to be one of the greatest violations of man's duty to himself as a moral being, whether they are lies to ourselves or others.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that there is renewed interest in lying. Sissela Bok, who teaches at Harvard Medical School, explores the problem in a 326-page newly-published book titled Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life, and in three essays appearing this spring in in The New York Times. The general stance that she and others adopt is that lying, with the best of intentions, does harm the liar, the person lied to, and the situation in which the lie is expressed. (The New York Times, April 18, 19, 20, 1978).

Writing Beyond Good and Evil and the Genealogy of Morals in the same century as Kant and Thoreau was Friedrich Nietzsche. Of honest books he writes: "Honest books make the reader honest, at least by luring into the open his hatred and aversion which his sly prudence otherwise knows how to conceal best. But against a book one lets oneself go, even if one is very reserved toward people." Of opinions and people, he writes: "Most people are nothing and are considered nothing until they have dressed themselves up in general convictions and public opinions--in accordance with tailored philosophy: clothes make people. Of the exceptional person, however, it must be said: only he that wears it makes the costume...."

Nietzsche's comment about convictions echoes the observation made by John Ciardi, translator of Dante's Inferno into English; Ciardi noted that while it is important to have the courage of our convictions, it is also important to have the courage of our confusions. For we are all of us at times alone with confusion and doubt about our destiny, as another philosopher, Albert Camus so admirably reminds us in his extraordinary essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus," which begins: "The gods had condemned

Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor," a feeling I suspect that some teachers have at the end of one term and the beginning of the next term.

While Ciardi and Camus were writing in the United States and France, Martin Buber was preparing for publication what Reinhold Niebuhr called a quarter century later "a great event in the religious life of the West." Appearing first in German in 1923 and English in 1937, I and Thou traces the interweavings of the I-Thou world and the I-It world, the personal and the impersonal, the world of people and the world of things. When a person uses the pronoun I, Buber observes, he means either I-Thou or I-It, for there is no way of using I except in relation to the rest of the universe.

What emerges from these philosophies is a clarion call for honesty and courage. After all these years, being true to ourselves is still an imperative. In responding to the call for honest action, it pays us to heed Shakespeare's warning of too much thought and no action, the tragedy of Hamlet, and too much action and no thought, the tragedy of Laertes and Horatio. A blend of thoughtful action is needed in all times.

Whether or not we engage in thoughtful action, we cannot escape the health of our ethics being mirrored in our daily words.

When we see cruelty to students, for instance, do we remain silent?

When we see cruelty to teachers, do we remain silent?

When administrators shun having their performance reviewed by those whose performance they review, do we remain silent?

Do we remain silent when articles and books are ripped off? When copyright laws are violated?

What do we do when we see image passing for substance?

When people are used in research, called subjects (a concept not too far removed from objects), have their rights of privacy violated, do you remain silent?

The maxim that "speech is silver, silence is gold" may tell us how to get ahead in the world, but it says little about ethical behavior.

If we choose to remain silent, it behooves us to reflect on the prophetic words of Ayn Rand in the foreword of Anthem:

> The greatest guilt today is that of people who accept collectivism by moral default; the people who seek protection from the necessity of taking a stand, by refusing to admit to themselves the nature of that which they are accepting; the people who support plans specifically designed to achieve serfdom, but hide behind the empty assertion that they are lovers of freedom, with no concrete meaning attached to the word; the people who believe that the content of ideas need not be examined, that principles need not be defined, and that facts can be eliminated by keeping one's eyes shut. They expect, when they find themselves in a world of bloody ruins and concentration camps, to escape moral responsibility by wailing: "But I didn't mean <u>this</u>!"
>
> Those who want slavery should have the grace to name it by its proper name. They must face the full meaning of that which they are advocating or condoning; the full, exact, specific meaning of collectivism, of its logical implications, of the principles upon which it is based, and of the ultimate consequences to which these principles will lead.
>
> They must face it, then decide whether this is what they want or not.

Not too long ago Stuart Chase, who is better known for his work, The Tyranny of Words, wrote an essay called "The Luxury of Integrity." He observed that some people can afford integrity more than other people. He even had a scale ranking the amount of freedom for integrity to be found within occupations and professions. About midway, he placed professors. Yet tenure provides teachers with the luxury of integrity, the academic freedom to ask ethical questions about ongoing practices:

Do we neglect students and teaching to do empty research?

Do we overtest and overskill students?

Do we close our eyes to real causes of illiteracy?

Do we ignore real needs of students, teachers, administrators?

How many among us question false methods? Misleading claims? Old ideas dressed up as new?

Is the love of money and power a root of evil in research?

Have you ever been asked to change marks (whether or not you have travelers cheques)?

How do you handle censorship more ominous and threatening than the censorship of Donald and Daisy Duck?

The questions of course are endless: we each have our own personal lists with the answers within ourselves.

If we find it too difficult to ask disturbing ethical questions and confront the answers, even under the aegis of tenure, perhaps we should consider the possibility of establishing in each school throughout the world a loyal opposition, a person or group whose responsibility it is to ask trenchant ethical questions, a concept similar to the concept of the official opposition party which is an integral part of many governments in the British Commonwealth.

In retrospect, the upshot appears clear that the extent to which we are willing to speak up is a measure of the spirit of our freedom and a revelation of our confidence in ourselves and humanity.

Author's Note: Appreciation is extended to Margaret J. Early of Syracuse University for her criticism of this paper.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aitken, Johan Lyall. English and Ethics. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976, 34 pp.

Bok, Sissela. Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, 326 pp.

Bok, Sissela. "To Lie or Not to Lie" - The Doctor's Dilemma Part 1), Here a Pseudo -, There a Pseudo - (Part 2), Bricks and Mortar and Deceit (Part 3), The New York Times, April 18-20, 1978.

Buber, Martin. I and Thou (translated from the German by Ronald Gregor Smith) 2nd edition (with Postscript by Author) New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, 137 pp.

Camus, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays (translated from the French by Justin O'Brien). New York: Vintage Books, 1952, 151 pp.

Chase, Stuart. "The Luxury of Integrity," The Nemesis of American Business and Other Essays. New York: Macmillan, 1931, pp. 27-50.

Descartes, René. "A Discourse on Method" (translated from the French by John Veitch), The Rationalists. New York: Anchor Books, 1974, pp. 35-175.

Ethics Resource Center. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: American Viewpoint, undated, 28 pp.

Joh, Jason N. "Respect for Persons," Theory into Practice, Vol. 14, No. 4 (October 1975) pp. 271-278.

Kant, Immanuel. Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals (translated by H. J. Paton). New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964, 148 pp.

Kant, Immanuel. The Doctrine of Virtue (translated by Mary J. Gregor). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964, 171 pp.

Levine, Melvin D. et al. "Ethics Rounds in a Children's Medical Center: Evaluation of a Hospital-Based Program for Continuing Education in Medical Ethics," Pediatrics, Vol. 60, No. 2 (August 1977), pp. 202-207.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. On the Geneology of Morals (translated from the German by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale) and Ecce Homo (translated by Walter Kaufmann). New York: Vintage Books, 1967, 367 pp.

Paul, Bill. "Donald Duck Faces A Morals Charge in Western Europe," The Wall Street Journal, Vol. 191, No. 29 (February 10, 1978), pp. 1 and 25.

Rand, Ayn. Anthem. New York: Signet, 1946, 123 pp.

Russell, Bertrand. Education and the Good Life. New York: Liveright Paperback Edition, 1970 (published originally in 1926 by Horace Liveright), 319 pp.

Spinoza, Benedict de. "Ethics" (translated by R.H.M. Elwes), The Rationalists. New York: Anchor Books, 1974, pp. 177-406.

Thoreau, Henry David. Walden and Other Writings. New York: The Modern Library, 1950, 732 pp.

Whitehead, Alfred North. The Aims of Education and Other Essays. New York: The Free Press Edition, 1967 (published originally in 1929 by Macmillan), 165 pp.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Philosophical Investigations (translated from the German by G.E.M. Anscombe) New York: Macmillan, 1953, 232 pp.